

Chesapeake Paddler



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Trip Report: December Assateague Camper

by Ralph Heimlich

Dave Isbell, who had shoulder surgery this season and was stymied by lack of paddling, organized an off-season kayak camper down on Assateague Island. He was joined by Gina Cicotello and me on Thursday morning in mid-December, running down Route 50 in the Big White Truck (BWT). We arrived at the Ranger Station and applied for our permits, intending to stay two nights at Green Run campsite and explore the southern National Seashore area, then shift camp to Pine Tree campsite for the remaining night.

The ranger explained that Hurricane Sandy had caused several major issues: breaking up asphalt parking lots at Bayview and Old Ferry Landing, shifting lots of sand from the (former) ocean side dunes onto the parking lots, roads, and campgrounds, and flooding from the Bay side that knocked down trees, washed out areas, destroyed the nature trail boardwalk, and stripped ground cover. To remedy this damage, the broken pavement was dumped on the former Bayview beach area and covered over with excess sand, creating a new broader beach area and picnic area. So if the beach looks bigger than you remembered it, that's why. Almost all of the work of shifting sand, cutting trees and removing debris was done by National Seashore maintenance personnel, including many brought in to help from other National Parks.

We drove down to the rejuvenated Bayview launch (Old Ferry Landing was still closed), and loaded up. I was paddling my new camping boat (photos and write-up [online](#)¹) for a semi-maiden voyage: it had never been out under a load before. The weather was remarkably benign for Assateague anytime, and especially in the "stormy" winter season. Temps in the 50's and a 15-20 knot breeze from the NE with whitecaps, going our way. Gina struggled to fit all her gear in her Chatham 17, and Dave stuffed everything (including BOTH a folding chair AND a folding stool) into his capacious Nomad, but had a great deal of trouble stuffing himself into the cockpit encumbered by dry suit and paddling mittens. We eventually got underway about one o'clock, with plenty of time to make the nine miles downwind to Green Run.

Alas, as soon as we paddled out, my OMEN wanted to head back up the Bay so strongly that neither my home-made rudder nor strong correction strokes helped much. Considerably flustered at this turn of events (the boat had handled well on unloaded test paddles), I landed on a nearby island and shifted a deck-loaded water bag aft to try and trim the boat up. Re-launching, I stomped the left rudder pedal so hard that the Okume wood pedals I made failed at the pivot point and broke. I had to re-land and fix the rudder (with a setting pin), effectively putting it out of commission for the duration. Pretty disgusted at this point, and embarrassed about holding up my paddling partners, I was pleased that strong weather cocking had disappeared and I could paddle straight down with the wind with no problem. (Note: Whenever things go from really bad to "no problem" as fast as that, stand by).

We had passed down between Tingles Island and the shore-side campground and were heading out across Chincoteague Bay. I paused to take a few pictures, and when I started paddling again, it was like moving a rock. What!!! Dave and Gina held up for me, and when I pulled even with them, Dave said "You're sinking." Sure enough, I was down heavily by the stern. Now the quick correction of my weathercocking issue made more sense! We decided to make for Pine Tree campsite to check out the cause of my demise, but when I paddled into shore and tried to turn up into the wind, I couldn't bring the bow around. Gina quickly put a tow on and dragged my recalcitrant steed around by the head so I could make it to the beach. Sure enough, the back compartment looked like a swimming pool. Apparently, between putting "too much" gear in the compartment, which kept the hatch from sealing correctly, and not joining the weatherstripping on the hatch coaming enough, I'd let a lot of water in. The issue hadn't arisen in my previous test paddles because the unloaded boat rode high out of the water. With a full load, the hatch was being over washed quite often by the following sea, and with the hatch cracked open, the water poured in.



Ralph Heimlich and his Omen, unencumbered by a full load of gear photo by Gina Cicotello

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

- **Bank Expenses** were \$86 for checks.
- **Equipment Expenses** were \$502.50 for rescue floats to be used in on-water events such as swim supports and demo days. Obtained by the efforts of Dave Biss.
- **Piracy Stipends for 2012** were \$2,262.19.
- **Insurance** was \$2,740.18. This was essentially unchanged, increasing by just \$2.30.
- **UMCP Pool Sessions** were \$900.
- **Annual Meeting Expenses** were \$362.
- **Holiday Party Expenses** were \$117.99.
- **Trip Planning Expenses** were \$58.60.

Note that the various charts may have minor inconsistencies due to the fact that the Income and Spending report is generated by financial banking software and does not track PayPal income until it is transferred into the bank account. Any questions please e-mail me at Treasurer@cpakayaker.com.

Richard Stevens
Treasurer

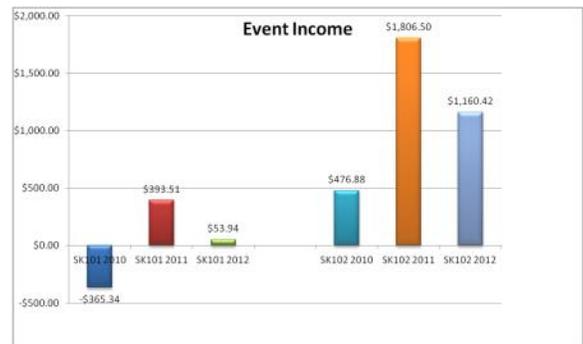
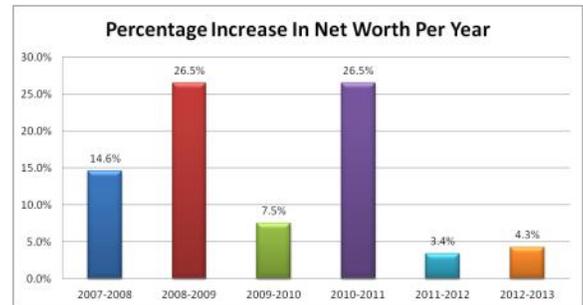
(Continued from page 1)

Oh well, that's what dry bags in the hatches are for—except that the air purge valve on my big taper bag had failed, so water got into the food bag, and I hadn't dry bagged my sleeping pad, cook kit and stove (water won't hurt them, will it?). Fortunately, removing the water restored the sea-worthiness of my craft (for now). However, by this time it was about three o'clock and sundown this close to the winter solstice was rapidly approaching, so we opted to camp at Pine Tree, rather than paddle the additional four miles down to Green Run and arrive after dark.

Pine Tree has to have the most elaborate toilet structure I've ever seen. The Park people had raked the debris from a wide circle around the toilet (maybe to keep the pit draining correctly?), had sawed up dozens of Loblolly Pines (no problem with firewood this trip), and bulldozed a lot of fresh sand in to restore the road. Pine needles and other jetsam covered the camping areas, and there was mud drying in alligator-skin cracking patterns that had clearly flooded in from Sandy. Some of the picnic tables lacked a seat or a plank, but there were enough sound ones to choose from. We quickly staked out our preferred tent sites, unpacked, started a fire against the coming night, and started on dinner. Because both of my pasta pacs were pre-soaked with sea-salt laden water (from the Bay), I offered to cook for Dave if he would do the honors the following night. My trusty (rusty) Coleman Peak I (probably older than many of our CPA members) was cranky, but after nearly exhausting Gina's lighter, I finally got it roaring along.

After dinner, we luxuriated by the fire, enjoyed the occasional glimpses of the Geminid meteor showers and the rest of the glittering wintertime array of stars in the inky sky, and later welcomed the sliver of new moon before it sunk beneath the western horizon.

Friday morning dawned early, and we were awakened by the duck hunters greeting the morning sun with 12 gauge salutes. Yes, Virginia, December is duck season in Maryland! Abandoning my warm sleeping bag, I hiked down the road and across the flats to the beach. The fresh sand showed a plethora of raccoon, fox, sika and whitetail deer tracks, and even a few duck tracks. Bufflehead and goldeneye flashed nervously through the small stream alongside the road and great blue herons squawked noisily away. A few anxious ponies grazed across the way, bolting every time another hunter let loose at some ducks. From the wire gate out to the four wheel drive track along the beach, there seemed to be a lot more loose sand driven up by Sandy. The beach itself was shallower, and steeper, packed hard under the strong surf. As I stood there looking out to sea, a couple of fishermen in four wheelers drove by down the beach.



Back at camp, Gina and Dave were nearly done with breakfast, and we discussed paddling plans for the day. Rather than pack up, we were going to camp at Pine Tree for two days and then see about plans for Saturday night. (Note: If you change the itinerary on the back country permit, call the ranger and let them know. Cell service on Assateague is very good, and they need to know where you are in case they have to evacuate you). We finished cleaning up and launched to paddle down island again, heading for Popes Bay.

After the breeze on Thursday afternoon, there was no wind at all on Friday, but a sunny day with temps headed to the high 50's. Duck hunters were still popping away in a desultory fashion at 9 AM, but we didn't have any close calls. It is so unusual (for me at least) to be paddling at Assateague with little or no wind. Small flocks of three to six Bufflehead took flight in front of us or cut across our path flying fast and low. We passed a flock of small geese (brant? Or maybe just junior Canada geese). The vistas and lack of definitive landmarks always make the distances at Assateague seem longer than they really are. It seemed like we paddled forever to cover the four miles down to the Pirate Island marking the entrance to Green Run Bay. The Pirate Islands may be named for 18th century buccaneer Charles Wilson, who reputedly buried ten iron-bound chests of silver worth over \$1 million on Assateague Island, but was hung before he could recover it (see <http://treasureworks.com/forums/214-treasure-legends/4315-buried-treasure-on-assateague-island>).

We passed the northern edge of Green Run Bay and headed out across it toward the entrance to the Middlemoor Thorofare, the entrance to the winding channel into Popes Bay, barely visible as a break in the marshes to the south. By now, a slight breeze had come up from the south, but we paddled on, correcting our course after a little navigational conference. We noted that the landmarks you can really see (abandoned houses, telephone poles) aren't marked on the charts, and the ones on the charts are difficult to distinguish from the nearly uniform marsh. We entered the thorofare, passing an abandoned house to the right and wove between telephone poles carrying no wire. By now, it was almost noon, and we were still a couple of miles short of Popes Bay, with more broad, winding channel to negotiate, so we abandoned our objective and turned back to explore the old house for a lunch spot.

The National Seashore has inherited a series of structures (this one on Middlemoor, Winter Quarter near Pine Tree, and the fishing shack at Green Run) which serve no purpose beyond attractive nuisance. I wonder why the Park Service doesn't just have some giant bonfires and erase

(Continued on page 11)

15th Annual SK-102, CPA On-Water Kayak Skills Workshop

Coming April 26-28, 2013

by Brian Blankinship



The skills clinic will be held at the same Lake Anna location. The pre-registration form is now on CPA's website: <CPAkayaker.com/sk102>. Please note once you pre-register, you will receive a pre-registration confirmation. When your registration is accepted, you will be invited to pay for the event through PayPal. Once you pay, your registration is complete and your slot secure. You will then receive an email with all the details you need to know about the event. The cost increased this year, but so did the value. Included in the \$58 cost is a one year membership to CPA and a commemorative, long sleeve, technical shirt. As always the registration includes camping on-site, morning coffee, dinner Saturday night, and access to the volunteer instruction. Here is the schedule:

Saturday Morning Session: 9:00-12:00

BLOCK 1: Kayak Design, Wet Exit, Basic Strokes—If you are new to paddling and/or have not had kayaking lessons

- Discover features separating various kayak designs and their value to you
- Wet Exiting is the most critical kayak skill for safety—a requirement for attending CPA trips
- The proper basic strokes will make your paddling much more fun and efficient.

BLOCK 2: Stroke Improvement, Intermediate Strokes, Bracing—For those who have been paddling for a year or more and are proficient in basic strokes.

- Improve your basic strokes to increase your efficiency and form
- Learn intermediate strokes such as hanging draw, draw on the move, bow rudder
- High and low bracing not only keep you upright but are the foundation of several kayak rolls

BLOCK 3: Self Rescues, Group Rescues, Towing—Be able to get yourself and others back into a kayak in deep water. A required safety skill.

- Become a self sufficient paddler, able to recover from wet exits
- Be able to rescue another kayaker who had to exit. Several methods are demonstrated
- Learn types of tow systems, methods and how to use them

BLOCK 4: Greenland Style Paddling—What is that thin paddle anyway?

- Advantages of Greenland style paddling
- Design of the Greenland paddle
- Proper Greenland style strokes

(Continued from page 8)

these eyesores, returning the land to a more natural state. Perhaps some well-meaning vandals can spare the officials a welter of paperwork and expense some dark night. But then, I'd be lost more often.

As we ate our lunch on an oyster shell beach, a returning hunter or oyster dredger stirred up a vast cloud of snow geese over toward Martin Bay in the west. While we couldn't make out a single bird from a distance of two to three miles, the huge number of them rising and honking was highly noteworthy as they undulated and reformed around the passing boat.

After lunch, we took a straight shot back toward camp, with a slight breeze at our back, and what turned out to be a favorable tidal current pushing us along. We covered the four to five miles that had taken more than three hours in the morning, in two hours of steady paddling, arriving back with plenty of daylight for exploration, a nap, and putting gear in order. Nineteen and a half nautical miles for the day, not bad for two seniors and "younger" person.

Another generous fire, a long winter's nap and we awoke on Saturday to another foggy fusillade of duck guns. The weather, which had been so warm and calm for stormy December, held out as the fog cleared off to sun, but the forecast was for rain after midnight, and near certain rain on Sunday. We decided to opt out of putting a wet camp away, and resolved to eat a leisurely

Saturday Afternoon Session: 1:00-3:30

BLOCK A: Stroke Improvement, Intermediate Strokes, Bracing—For those who have been paddling for a year or more and are proficient in basic strokes.

- Improve your basic strokes to increase your efficiency and form
- Learn intermediate strokes such as hanging draw, draw on the move, bow rudder
- High and low bracing not only keep you upright but are the foundation of several kayak rolls

BLOCK B: Self Rescues, Group Rescues—If you took Block 1, this is the best follow up course for new paddlers.

- Become a self sufficient paddler, able to recover from wet exits, learn importance of floatation
- Be able to rescue another kayaker who had to exit. Several methods are demonstrated.

BLOCK C: Advanced Rescues—For those proficient in self and group rescues, take it to the next level

- How to rescue a boat without floatation that "sank"
- Techniques to rescue an injured paddler

BLOCK D: Rolling—For more advanced paddlers who have strong bracing skills. The best form of rescue is to never exit the boat. Classes are 1:1 to 1:3 instructor to student ratio, and are limited availability.

SK102 is an extremely popular event and always fills up quickly. Those new kayakers attending SK 101—Introduction to Sea Kayaking, get priority registration for SK 102.

breakfast, explore the beach and Winter Quarter on foot a bit, and then pack up and head back to the BWT. Having eaten much of our food and dumping the unused excess water (just in case), packing the boats went much smoother and there was very little deck load to worry about. We paddled out, bidding a fond farewell to Pine Tree camp. The trip back was marked with more and more little rafts of ducks, and try as we might, we didn't see much more exotic than the bufflehead and occasional goldeneye. As we neared Bayview launch, the calmness of the water seemed tropical, and wholly out of character with my usual impression of Assateague. While I'd somehow ditched my weather witch reputation (ascending spirals of worse and worse weather with each trip I made to the seashore), the trip had not been without trials of the equipment kind. I headed home with a lengthy to-do list of changes and refittings before the OMEN would be my ideal camping boat.

Many thanks to Dave Isbell for instigating and accommodating my trouble-plagued boat, and to Gina Cicotello for coming along and sharing her fund of stories of trips from the Adirondacks to the Bahamas. My few pictures (I was too busy bailing) are online at <https://picasaweb.google.com/102459087707170525949/AssateagueCamperDecember2012> and Gina's at <http://pasadenagina.smuqumug.com/Kayaking/Assateague-Dec-2012/>.

¹Customizing a CLC Patuxent 19.5 (10/6/12): <http://www.cpkayaker.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=7066&p=25144> &hilit=omen#p25144



Gina Cicotello at trip's end, Assateague Kayak Camping Trip
photo by Ralph Heimlich

Inside our January-February, 2013 issue:

- [Trip Report—Assateague December Camper](#)
- [CPA 2013 Virtual Calendar Is Now Available](#)
- Paddler Profiles—[Chip Walsh](#) and [Allison Thomson](#)
- [CPA Tentative 2013 Calendar](#)
- [Treasurer's 2012 Final Annual Financial Report](#)
- [SK 101 Introduction to Sea Kayaking in March](#)
- [SK 102 Skills Workshop Coming in April](#)
- [Pirate Groups Hold Gatherings](#)

The Chesapeake Paddler

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